

Responses to Common Holocaust-denial Claims

The following are summaries of five major claims frequently made by Holocaust-denial propagandists. Source: ADL

1. The Holocaust Did Not Occur Because There Is No Single "Master Plan" for Jewish Annihilation

There is no single Nazi document that expressly enumerates a "master plan" for the annihilation of European Jewry. Holocaust-denial propagandists misrepresent this fact as an exposure of the Holocaust "hoax"; in doing so, they reveal a fundamentally misleading approach to the history of the era. That there was no single document does not mean there was no plan. The "Final Solution" — the Nazis' comprehensive plan to murder all European Jews — was, as the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust observes, "the culmination of a long evolution of Nazi Jewish policy."¹ The destruction process was shaped gradually: it was borne of many thousands of directives.²

The development and implementation of this process was overseen and directed by the highest tier of Nazi leadership, including Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, Adolf Eichmann, Hermann Goering and Adolf Hitler himself. For the previous two decades, Hitler had relentlessly pondered Jewish annihilation.³ In a September 16, 1919, letter he wrote that while "the Jewish problem" demanded an "anti-Semitism of reason" -- comprising systematic legal and political sanctions -- "the final goal, however, must steadfastly remain the removal of the Jews altogether."⁴

Throughout the 1920s, Hitler maintained that "the Jewish question" was the "pivotal question" for his Party and would be solved "with well-known German thoroughness to the final consequence."⁵ With his assumption to power in 1933, Hitler's racial notions were implemented by measures that increasingly excluded Jews from German society.

On January 30, 1939, Hitler warned that if Jewish financiers and Bolsheviks initiated war, "The result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."⁶ On September 21, 1939, after the Germans invaded Poland, SD chief Heydrich ordered the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units operating in German-occupied territory) to forcibly concentrate Polish Jews into ghettos, alluding to an unspecified "final aim."⁷

In the summer of 1941, with preparations underway for invading Russia, large-scale mass murder initiatives -- already practiced domestically upon the mentally ill and deformed -- were broadly enacted against Jews. Heydrich, acting on Hitler's orders, directed the Einsatzgruppen to implement the "special tasks" of annihilation in the Soviet Union of Jews and Soviet commissars.⁸ On July 31, Heydrich received orders from Goering to prepare plans "for the implementation of the aspired final solution of the Jewish question" in all German-occupied areas.⁹ Eichmann, while awaiting trial in Israel in 1960, related that Heydrich had told him in August 1941 that "the Führer has ordered the physical extermination of the Jews."¹⁰ Rudolf Hoess, the Commandant of Auschwitz, wrote in 1946 that "In the summer of 1941... Himmler said to me, 'The Führer has ordered the Final Solution to the Jewish Question... I have chosen the Auschwitz camp for this purpose.'"¹¹

On January 20, 1942, Heydrich convened the Wannsee Conference to discuss and coordinate implementation of the Final Solution. Eichmann later testified at his trial:

These gentlemen... were discussing the subject quite bluntly, quite differently from the language that I had to use later in the record. During the conversation they minced no words about it at all... they spoke about methods of killing, about liquidation, about extermination.¹²

Ten days after the conference, while delivering a speech at the Sports Palace in Berlin that was recorded by the Allied monitoring service, Hitler declared: "The result of this war will be the complete annihilation of the Jews. . . the hour will come when the most evil universal enemy of all time will be finished, at least or a thousand years."¹³ On February 24, 1943, he stated: "This struggle will not end with the annihilation of Aryan mankind, but with the extermination of the Jewish people in Europe."¹⁴ Approximately 6 million Jews were killed in the course of Hitler's Final Solution.

2. There Were No Gas Chambers Used for Mass Murder at Auschwitz and Other Camps

Death camp gas chambers were the primary means of execution used against the Jews during the Holocaust. The Nazis issued a directive implementing large-scale gas chambers in the fall of 1941 but, by then, procedures facilitating mass murder, including the utilization of smaller gas chambers, were already in practice. Before their use in death camps, gas chambers were central to Hitler's "eugenics" program. Between January 1940 and August 1941, 70,273 Germans -- most of them physically handicapped or mentally ill -- were gassed, 20-30 at a time, in hermetically shut chambers disguised as shower rooms.¹⁵

Meanwhile, mass shooting of Jews had been extensively practiced on the heels of Germany's Eastern campaign. But these actions by murder squads had become an increasingly unwieldy process by October 1941. Three directors of the genocide, Erhard Wetzel, head of the Racial-Policy Office, Alfred Rosenberg, consultant on Jewish affairs for the Occupied Eastern Territories, and Victor Brack, deputy director of the Chancellery, met at the time with Adolf Eichmann to discuss the use of gas chambers in the genocide program.¹⁶ Thereafter, two technical advisors for the euthanasia gas chambers, Kriminalkommissar Christian Wirth and a Dr. Kallmeyer, were sent to the East to begin construction of mass gas chambers.¹⁷ Physicians who had implemented the euthanasia program were also transferred.

Mobile gassing vans, using the exhaust fumes of diesel engines to kill passengers, were used to kill Jews at Chelmno and Treblinka -- as well as other sites, not all of them concentration camps -- starting in November 1941.¹⁸ At least 320,000 Chelmno prisoners, most of them Jews, were killed by this method; a total of 870,000 Jews were murdered at Treblinka using gas vans and diesel-powered gas chambers.¹⁹ Gas chambers were installed and operated at Belzec, Lublin, Sobibor, Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau from September 3, 1941, when the first experimental gassing of a group of Soviet prisoners-of-war took place at Auschwitz, until November 1944.²⁰ Working with chambers measuring an average 225 square feet, the Nazis forced to their deaths 700 to 800 men, women and children at a time.²¹ Two-thirds of this program was completed in 1943-44, and at its height it accounted for as many as 20,000 victims per day.²² Authorities have estimated that these gas chambers accounted for the deaths of approximately 2½ to 3 million Jews.

Holocaust-denial attacks on this record of mass murder intensified following the end of the Cold War when it was reported that the memorial at Auschwitz was changed in 1991 to read that 1 million had died there, instead of 4 million as previously recorded. For Holocaust deniers, this change appeared to confirm arguments that historical estimates of Holocaust deaths had been deliberately exaggerated, and that scholars were beginning to "retreat" in the face of "revisionist" assertions. Thus, for example, Willis Carto wrote in the February 6, 1995, issue of *The Spotlight*, the weekly tabloid of his organization, Liberty Lobby, that "All 'experts' until 1991 claimed that 4 million Jews were killed at Auschwitz. This impossible figure was reduced in 1991. . . to 1.1 million. . . . The facts about deaths at Auschwitz, however. . . , are still wrong. The Germans kept detailed records of Auschwitz deaths. . . . These show that no more than 120,000 persons of all religions and ethnicity died at Auschwitz during the war. . . ." In fact, Western scholars have never supported the figure of 4 million deaths at Auschwitz; the basis of this Soviet estimate -- an analysis of the capacity of crematoria at Auschwitz and Birkenau -- has long been discredited. As early as 1952, Gerald Reitlinger, a British historian, had convincingly challenged this method of calculation. Using statistics compiled in registers for Himmler, he asserted that approximately 1 million people had died at Auschwitz; Raul Hilberg in 1961, and Yehuda Bauer in 1989, confirmed Reitlinger's estimate of Auschwitz victims. Each of these scholars, nonetheless, has recognized that nearly 6 million Jews were killed overall during the Holocaust.²³ Polish authorities were therefore responding to long-accepted Western scholarship, further confirmed subsequently by documents released in post-Soviet Russia; the cynical allegations of "Holocaust revisionism" played no part in their decision.

3. Holocaust Scholars Rely on the Testimony of Survivors Because There Is No Objective Documentation Proving the Nazi Genocide.

Another frequent claim of Holocaust "revisionists" concerns what they describe as the lack of objective documentation proving the facts of the Holocaust, and the reliance by scholars on biased and poorly recollected testimonies of survivors. However, the Germans themselves left no shortage of documentation and testimony to these events, and no serious scholar has relied solely on survivor testimony as the conclusive word on Holocaust history. Lucy Dawidowicz, in the preface to her authoritative work, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*, wrote,

"The German documents captured by the Allied armies at the war's end have provided an incomparable historical record, which, with regard to volume and accessibility, has been unique in the annals of scholarship.... The National Archives and the American Historical Association jointly have published 67 volumes of Guides to German Records Microfilmed at Alexandria, VA. For my work I have limited myself mainly to published German documents."²⁴

The author then proceeds to list 303 published sources — excluding periodicals — documenting the conclusions of her research. Among these sources are the writings of recognizable Nazi policy makers such as Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Rudolf Hoess and Alfred Rosenberg.

Similarly, Raul Hilberg in his three-volume edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, wrote, "Between 1933 and 1945 the public offices and corporate entities of Nazi Germany generated a large volume of correspondence. Some of these documents were destroyed in Allied bombings, and many more were systematically burned in the course of retreats or in anticipation of surrender. Nevertheless, the accumulated paper work of the German bureaucracy was vast enough to survive in significant quantities, and even sensitive folders remained."²⁵

It is thus largely from these primary sources that the history of the Holocaust has been compiled. A new factor in this process is the sudden availability of countless records from the former Soviet Union, many of which had been overlooked or suppressed since their capture at war's end by the Red Army. Needless to say, the modification of specific details in this history is certain to continue for a number of years to come, considering the vastness and complexity of the events which comprise the Holocaust. However, it is equally certain that these modifications will only confirm the Holocaust's enormity, rather than -- as the "revisionists" would -- call it into question.

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4. There Was No Net Loss of Jewish Lives Between 1941 and 1945

Another frequent "revisionist" assertion calls into question the generally accepted estimates of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In attempting to portray the deaths of millions of Jews as an exaggeration or a fabrication, Holocaust deniers wildly manipulate reference works, almanac statistics, geopolitical data, bedrock historical facts and other sources of information and reportage.

For example, "revisionists" commonly cite various almanac or atlas figures -- typically compiled before comprehensive accounts on the Holocaust were available -- that appear to indicate that the worldwide Jewish population before and after World War II remained essentially stable, thereby "proving" that 6 million Jews could not have died during this period.

The widely cited "6 million" figure is derived from the initial 1945 Nuremberg trial estimate of 5.7 million deaths; subsequent censuses, statistical analyses, and other demographic studies of European Jewry have consistently demonstrated the essential accuracy of this first tally.²⁶ After nearly 50 years of study, historians agree that approximately 6 million Jews perished during the course of the Nazi genocide.²⁷

In *The War Against the Jews*, Lucy Dawidowicz offers a country-by-country accounting of Jewish deaths.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF JEWS KILLED IN THE FINAL SOLUTION			
Country	Estimated Pre-Final Solution Population	Estimated Jewish Population Annihilated	
		Number	Percent
Poland	3,300,000	3,000,000	90
Baltic countries	253,000	228,000	90
Germany/Austria	240,000	210,000	90
Protectorate	90,000	80,000	89
Slovakia	90,000	75,000	83
Greece	70,000	54,000	77
The Netherlands	140,000	105,000	75

Hungary	650,000	450,000	70
SSR White Russia	375,000	245,000	65
SSR Ukraine*	1,500,000	900,000	60
Belgium	65,000	40,000	60
Yugoslavia	43,000	26,000	60
Romania	600,000	300,000	50
Norway	1,800	900	50
France	350,000	90,000	26
Bulgaria	64,000	14,000	22
Italy	40,000	8,000	20
Luxembourg	5,000	1,000	20
Russia (RSFSR)*	975,000	107,000	11
Denmark	8,000	—	—
Finland	2,000	—	—
TOTAL	8,861,800	5,933,900	67
<i>*The Germans did not occupy all the territory in this republic</i>			

5. The Nuremberg Trials Were a "Farce of Justice" Staged for the Benefit of the Jews

Yet another centerpiece of "revisionist" propaganda attacks the objectivity and legal validity of the postwar Nuremberg Trials, where much information about the Holocaust first became public, and where the general history of the genocide was first established.

The actual process of bringing Nazi war criminals to justice was a lengthy and complicated effort involving the differing legal traditions and political agendas of the United States, England, France and the Soviet Union. As the historical record shows, the allied victors, if anything, erred on the side of leniency toward the accused Nazis.

Discussions concerning allied treatment of war criminals had begun as early as October 1943.²⁹ In the summer months following Germany's surrender in 1945, British, American and Soviet representatives met in London to create the charter for an international military tribunal to prosecute "major criminals" whose offenses extended over the entire Reich, and who therefore could be punished by joint decision of the Governments of the Allies.³⁰ By early autumn, the Allies had resolved their debates over whom to prosecute and how to define the crimes committed during the Holocaust; the first trials began thereafter in Nuremberg, before an international military tribunal. The chief defendant was Hermann Goering, but the prosecution also selected 20 other leading officials from the Nazi party, German government ministries, central bureaucracy, armament and labor specialists, the military and territorial chiefs.³¹

These trials did not result in either "rubber stamp" guilty verdicts or identical sentences. In fact, of the 21 defendants, three were set free; one received a 10-year sentence; one a 15-year sentence; two, 20-year sentences; three, life sentences, and 11 received the death penalty.³²

The defendants, moreover, had access to 206 attorneys, 136 of whom had been Nazi party members.³³ Furthermore, as Raul Hilberg stated, "The judges in Nuremberg were established American lawyers. They had not come to exonerate or convict. They were impressed with their task, and they approached it with much experience in the law and little anticipation of the facts."³⁴

A second round of trials resulted in 25 death sentences, 20 life sentences, 97 sentences of 25 years or less, and 35 not-guilty verdicts.³⁵ By 1951, following the recommendations of an American-run clemency board, 77 of the 142 convicted criminals had been released from prison.³⁶

NOTES

1. Israel Gutman (Editor in Chief), *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, New York, 1990, p. 788.
2. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Student Edition), New York, 1985, p. 263.
3. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945*, New York, 1975, pp. 150-166.

4. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 489.
5. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 489.
6. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 490.
7. *Holocaust*, Jerusalem: Keter Books, 1974, p. 104
8. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 657.
9. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 492.
10. Ronnie Duggar, *The Texas Observer*, Austin, 1992, D. 48.
11. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, pp. 641-642.
12. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 657.
13. Ronnie Duggar, *The Texas Observer*, Austin, 1992, D. 48.
14. *Holocaust*, pp. 105-106.
15. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, p. 453.
16. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust*, New York, 1985, p. 219.
17. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, New York, 1985, pp. 873-876.
18. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, pp. 541-544
19. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2,, p. 542; Volume 4, pp. 1483, 1486.
20. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Volume 2, pp. 113, 116.
21. *Holocaust*, p. 86.
22. *Holocaust*, p. 87.
23. Reitlinger, who conducted his research before Hilberg and other scholars, arrives at a more conservative figure of approximately 4.5 million victims; he nonetheless estimates that one-third of the internees at concentration camps died as a result of starvation, overwork, disease, and other consequences of their captivity. Although his murder count is somewhat lower than that of later scholars, his overall death count remains consistent with subsequent research.
24. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews*, p. 437.
25. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1223.
26. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945*, p. 402.
27. Peter Hayes, Associate Professor of German History at Northwestern University, states, "After years of studying this matter, I know of *no authority* who puts the number of Jews killed [emphasis in original] by the Nazis at less than 5.1 or more than 5.9 million men, women and children.
28. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945*, p. 403.
29. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1060.
30. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1061.
31. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1066.
32. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1070.
33. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1075.
34. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1076.
35. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3, p. 1077-1078.
36. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume 3,, p. 1079.